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SOLAR TILE ASSEMBLY

The present invention relates to a solar tile assembly and is concerned particularly with a two part solar roofing tile and a method for providing electrical connection between the respective parts of the two part solar
5 roofing tile.

It is known to use solar panels comprising photovoltaic modules that may be placed onto the exterior of a building or replace the existing roof tiles. Examples of such photovoltaic modules are described in US 5590495, US 5112408 and EP 0710806. The photovoltaic modules systems
10 normally comprise a plurality of solar panels that are electrically connected to form a circuit. The solar panels may require routine maintenance that necessitates the removal of one or more of the solar panels.

According to a first aspect of the present invention there is provided a
15 solar tile assembly comprising a removable outer panel that comprises photovoltaic means and a first electrical connector, and an inner support structure that comprises a second electrical connector, the arrangement being such that in use an electrical connection between the first electrical connector and the second electrical connector is achieved by bringing
20 together the outer panel and the inner support structure.

The electrical connection between the first electrical connector and the second electrical connector is preferably broken by the removal of the outer panel from the inner support structure.

Preferably, the outer panel is slidably attached to the inner support
25 structure by attachment means comprising a channel section formed to receive an attachment element.

Preferably, the outer panel comprises the attachment element and the inner support structure is formed with the channel for receiving and retaining the attachment element of the outer panel.

- The outer panel conveniently comprises a pair of attachment elements and
- 5 the inner support structure is formed with a pair of channels for receiving and retaining the attachment elements of the outer panel.

The electrical connection between the first electrical connector and the second electrical connector is preferably broken by sliding the outer panel in a direction that is substantially parallel to plain of outermost

10 surface of the outer panel.

Preferably the outer panel is removed from the inner support structure by first sliding the outer panel in a direction that is substantially parallel to plain of outermost surface of the outer panel and then lifting the outer panel in a direction perpendicular to the direction of the slide direction.

- 15 In use the inner support structure can be attached to the outer surface of a structure such as a building. If necessary a damaged outer panel can be easily removed from the solar tile assembly whilst still leaving the inner support structure fixed to the building. A new outer panel can then replace the damaged outer panel. Also, the outer panel and the inner support structure can be easily inspected by removing the outer panel.
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The inner support structure preferably comprises an electrical junction box comprising the second electrical connector.

- The electrical junction box of the inner support structure preferably comprises an electrical input terminal and an electrical output terminal,
- 25 the arrangement being such that the electrical input terminal and the

electrical output terminal provide electrical communication between corresponding solar tile assemblies. In use the photovoltaic means of the respective solar assemblies generate electrical energy and there may be an electrical network provided between the plurality of solar title
5 assemblies.

It is preferable that the outer panel comprises an electrical junction box formed with the first electrical connector, the arrangement being such that in the assembled state of the solar tile assembly the first connector and the second connector provide electrical communication between the
10 two electrical junction boxes.

The solar tile assemblies may be conveniently fixed to roof battens of a conventional roof structure and may replace the roofing tiles.

According to an embodiment of the first invention the support structure comprises means for providing electrical connections between adjacent
15 solar tile assemblies.

The means for providing electrical connections between adjacent solar tile assemblies preferably comprises an electrical connector on opposite sides of the support structure.

According to a second aspect of the present invention there is provided a
20 removable solar tile comprising photovoltaic means and an electrical connector, the arrangement being such that in use an electrical connection between the electrical connector of the removable solar tile and a second electrical connector of an inner support structure is achieved by the bringing together of the outer panel and the inner support
25 structure.

According to a third aspect of the present invention there is provided an inner support structure for a removable tile comprising photovoltaic means, the inner support structure comprising an electrical connector, the arrangement being such that in use an electrical connection between the 5 electrical connector of the inner support structure and an electrical connector of the removable tile is achieved by the bringing together of the removable tile and the inner support structure.

According to a fourth aspect of the present invention there is provided a method for providing an electrical connection for a solar tile assembly 10 comprising a removable outer panel that comprises photovoltaic means and a first electrical connector, and an inner support structure that comprises a second electrical connector, the method comprises sliding the outer panel towards the inner support structure in a direction substantially parallel to the plane of the outer panel until the first 15 electrical connector contacts the second electrical connector.

Preferably the electrical connection between the respective parts of the solar tile assembly is broken by sliding the outer panel in the opposite direction.

The invention may include any combination of the features or limitations 20 referred to herein.

The invention can be put into practice in various ways, but an embodiment will now be described by way of example only with reference to the accompanying drawings in which:

Figure 1 is an isometric view of a solar tile assembly in a closed 25 assembled condition;

Figure 2 is an isometric view of the solar tile assembly shown in Figure 1 and shows the assembly in a partially open condition;

Figure 3 is an isometric view of the solar tile assembly shown in Figure 1 and shows the outer panel separated from the inner support frame;
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Figure 4 is an isometric view of the solar tile assembly shown in Figure 1 and shows the outer panel removed from the inner support frame; and

Figure 5 is an isometric view of the solar tile assembly shown in Figure 1 and shows more detail of a variable gauge clip, more detail of the outer panel structure and three partial cut-away sections of the outer panel.
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With reference to the Figures 1 to 5, a solar tile assembly 1A comprises a removable rectangular outer panel 1 that comprises ten photovoltaic cells 3 disposed on the outermost surface thereof, and a substantially rectangular inner support structure 2. The photovoltaic cells 3 cover the lower portion of the outer panel 1. Any suitable photovoltaic means may be used for the solar tile assembly.
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The outer panel 1 is secured to the inner support structure 2 using two fasteners 5a, 5b disposed at the front end of the solar tile assembly 1A. The fasteners 5a, 5b may typically be quarter or half turn captive fasteners. These types of fasteners have the added advantage of being retained by the outer panel 1 during assembly/disassembly processes.
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The inner support structure 2 comprises a framework at one of which there is formed a lower stepped interlockable section 4. In use the
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interlockable section 4 is disposed under a portion of an adjacent tile assembly, as is well known in the art of roof tile design. The inner support structure 2 is formed with three sets of holes 6. These holes 6 allow fixing nails or screws to be used to attach the inner structure 2 to 5 roof tiling battens located underneath the inner structure 2. For certain roof designs no fixing nails or screws will be needed to hold the tile assembly 1A onto the roof. Disposed within the frame of the support structure 2 there is an electrical junction box 7. The inner support structure 2 comprises two parallel end members 7a, 7b (shown in Figures 10 3 to 5). Formed within each of the respective end members 7a, 7b there are respective slide channels 8a, 8b. At one end of the slide channel 8a there is formed a cutaway access port 9a. At the corresponding end of the slide channel 8b (not shown) there is formed a cutaway access port 9b.

The outer panel 1 comprises a pair of attachment elements 17a, 17b fixed 15 to the inner surface of the outer panel 1 (see Figure 5). The attachment elements 17a, 17b are a triangular wedge shape. A heel portion 17c extends from each of the respective vertical faces of the wedge shapes. The attachment elements 17a, 17b are shaped to be received by the access ports 9a, 9b.

20 Also formed in the inner support structure 2 there are two substantially parallel channels 10 (shown in Figures 4 and 5). At one end of each channel 10 there is provided an access port 10a, 10b. Each port 10a, 10b has a greater width than the width of the remaining portions of the respective channels 10. The ports 10a, 10b provide access to the 25 channels 10 for two variable gauge clips 11a, 11b.

It will be appreciated by the skilled person in the art that the channels 10 may be used in place of the slide channels 8a, 8b. Channels 10 can

operate to perform the function of channels 8a, 8b by comprising two sets of slide fixtures, one set being attached to the outer panel 1.

Should added retention for the solar tile assembly be required, for example in high winds, the clips 11a, 11b may slide along the 5 channels 10 and are used to fix the outer panel 1 to an outer panel of an adjacent solar panel assembly located below.

The electrical junction box 7 of the inner support structure 2 comprises a pair of electrical connectors 13, an electrical output lead 14 and an electrical input connector 15. The outer panel 1 comprises an electrical 10 junction box 19 that comprises a pair of electrical connectors 19a. In the assembled closed condition of the solar tile assembly 1A (as shown in Figure 1) the electrical connectors 13 are in electrical contact with the electrical connectors 19a.

To disassemble the solar tile assembly 1A the outer panel 1 is first slid in 15 a direction Z and this causes a break in the electrical connection between the connectors 13 and the connectors 19a. The outer panel 1 is slid in the direction Z until the attachment elements 17a, 17b abut the respective lowermost ends of the channels 10. The outer panel 1 will stay in this position without sliding completely off the support structure 2 (as shown 20 in Figure 2). In order to separate the outer panel 1 from the inner support structure 2 the outer panel 1 is moved back a small distance in the opposite direction to direction Z until the attachment elements 17a, 17b align with the respective access ports 9a, 9b. The outer panel 1 can then be lifted away from the inner support structure 2 (as shown in 25 Figure 3).

When the solar tile assembly 1A is reassembled and the outer panel 1 is slid back up into position, the inwardly-extending lip 20 on the front

underside of the outer panel 1 fits under a recess 12 that is formed in the lowermost edge of the inner support structure 2 so providing secure anchorage against high wind.

The outer panel 1 is constructed typically of two planar sheets of material
5 (see Figure 5). The uppermost sheet is a transparent material 22a that permits sunlight to reach the photovoltaic elements. In the embodiment shown, the uppermost sheet 22a is larger on three sides than the lowermost sheet 22b and all the fixing arrangements are mounted underneath and inside this area. Hence, no joints exist which could
10 cause water ingress when exposed to the weather. The materials that may be used for the construction of the parts of the solar tile assembly 1A include metallic or non-metallic including plastics, glass, metal and ceramics/clay/cement.

The underside of the inner support structure 2 has location points to
15 allow it to be easily positioned on the roof of a building and also to retain it in position whilst fixing down. The variable gauge clips 11a, 11b may be used to fix the outer panel 1 to a tile assembly located in a row below, should added retention be required for example in high wind speed areas.

20 The electrical connection between the outer panel 1 and the inner support structure 2 of the solar tile assembly 1A is made as the outer panel 1 is assembled onto the inner support structure 2. The electrical connection between the outer panel 1 and the inner support structure 2 of the solar tile assembly 1A is broken as the outer panel 1 is disassembled from the
25 inner support structure 2.

It will be noted by those skilled in the art that electrical connection between the outer panel 1 and the inner support structure 2 can be broken

without the complete separation of the parts because the outer panel 1 has a sliding arrangement with the inner support structure 2.

When the solar tile assembly 1A is assembled, the electrical connection between the connectors 13 and the connectors 19a is retained by use of
5 fasteners 5a, 5b located on the front edge of the outer panel 1. When the fasteners 5a, 5b are undone and outer panel 1 is released the electrical connection will be broken as the outer panel 1 slides in direction Z. When the outer panel 1 stops at the lower part of the channels 10 the junction box 7 will be exposed, therefore allowing access to all necessary
10 electrical components.

Flying leads 14 may be used to connect adjacent solar tile assemblies together to complete a circuit. Fixed connections 16 may also be used on the sides of the inner support structure 2 such that as a solar tile assembly is positioned adjacent to another solar tile assembly, an
15 electrical connection can be made because the two parts of the connector 16 (male and female) are integral with the parts of adjacent tiles assemblies.

As a row of tile assemblies is completed in the horizontal plane and the next row started, a cable would normally have to run from the end of the
20 last row along the roof to the start of the second row. This uses a considerable amount of cable and therefore incurs electrical losses. An alternative arrangement may be made where the wiring of the connections is reversed in alternate rows. The end tile assembly can then be directly connected with a short wire to the next row above or below. In order to
25 distinguish between the tile assemblies with the two types of wiring, the inner support structure 2 of the tile assembly may be colour coded so that during assembly it is easy to lay alternative rows with the correct wiring arrangement.

The dimensions of the solar panel assembly 1A can be made to correspond with the dimensions of conventional roof tiles. Hence, the solar tile assembly can be easily fitted onto an existing roof. The roof may be partially covered by an array of solar tile assemblies and partially 5 covered by conventional roof tiles. Due to the construction and configuration of the solar tile assembly 1A, the outer panel 1 of an assembly 1A can be removed from the array of assemblies without disturbing the other assemblies.

When there is an array of assemblies, the upper portion 40 of the outer 10 panel 1 that is not formed with photovoltaic cells 3 because this area is normally covered by a lower portion of an upper adjacent solar tile assembly.

It will be appreciated that the solar tile assembly can be attached to any suitable structure outside or inside a building.

CLAIMS

1. A solar tile assembly comprising a removable outer panel that comprises photovoltaic means and a first electrical connector, and an inner support structure that comprises a second electrical connector, the
5 arrangement being such that in use an electrical connection between the first electrical connector and the second electrical connector is achieved by bringing together the outer panel and the inner support structure.
2. A solar tile assembly as claimed in claim 1, wherein the electrical connection between the first electrical connector and the second electrical
10 connector is broken by the removal of the outer panel from the inner support structure.
3. A solar tile assembly as claimed in claim 1 or claim 2, wherein the outer panel is slidably attached to the inner support structure by attachment means comprising a channel section formed to receive an
15 attachment element.
4. A solar tile assembly as claimed in claim 3, wherein the outer panel comprises the attachment element and the inner support structure is formed with the channel for receiving and retaining the attachment element of the outer panel.
- 20 5. A solar tile assembly as claimed in claim 3, wherein the outer panel comprises a pair of attachment elements and the inner support structure is formed with a pair of channels for receiving and retaining the attachment elements of the outer panel.
6. A solar tile assembly as claimed in claim 1, wherein the electrical
25 connection between the first electrical connector and the second electrical

connector is broken by sliding the outer panel in a direction that is substantially parallel to plain of outermost surface of the outer panel.

7. A solar tile assembly as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 6, wherein the outer panel is removed from the inner support structure by
5 first sliding the outer panel in a direction that is substantially parallel to plain of outermost surface of the outer panel and then lifting the outer panel in a direction perpendicular to the direction of the slide direction.
8. A solar tile assembly as claimed in any one of the preceding claims, wherein, in use, the inner support structure can be attached to the
10 outer surface of a structure such as a building or attached to an independent support structure inside or outside a building.
9. A solar tile assembly as claimed in any one of the preceding claims, wherein the inner support structure comprises an electrical junction box that comprises the second electrical connector.
- 15 10. A solar tile assembly as claimed in claim 9, wherein the electrical junction box of the inner support structure comprises an electrical input terminal and an electrical output terminal, the arrangement being such that the electrical input terminal and the electrical output terminal provide electrical communication between corresponding solar tile
20 assemblies.
11. A solar tile assembly as claimed in claim 9 or claim 10, wherein the outer panel comprises an electrical junction box formed with the first electrical connector, the arrangement being such that in the assembled state of the solar tile assembly the first connector and the second
25 connector provide electrical communication between the two electrical junction boxes.

12. A solar tile assembly as claimed in any one of the preceding claims, wherein the support structure comprises means for providing electrical connections between adjacent solar tile assemblies.
13. A solar tile assembly as claimed in claim 12, wherein the means for providing electrical connections between adjacent solar tile assemblies comprises an electrical connector on opposite sides of the support structure.
14. A removable solar tile comprising photovoltaic means and an electrical connector, the arrangement being such that in use an electrical connection between the electrical connector of the removable solar tile and a second electrical connector of an inner support structure is achieved by bringing together the outer panel and the inner support structure.
15. An inner support structure for a removable tile that comprises photovoltaic means, the inner support structure comprising an electrical connector, the arrangement being such that in use an electrical connection between the electrical connector of the inner support structure and an electrical connector of the removable tile is achieved by bringing together the removable tile and the inner support structure.
16. A method for providing an electrical connection for a solar tile assembly comprising a removable outer panel that comprises photovoltaic means and a first electrical connector, and an inner support structure that comprises a second electrical connector, the method comprising sliding the outer panel towards the inner support structure in a direction substantially parallel to the plain of the outer panel until the first electrical connector contacts the second electrical connector.

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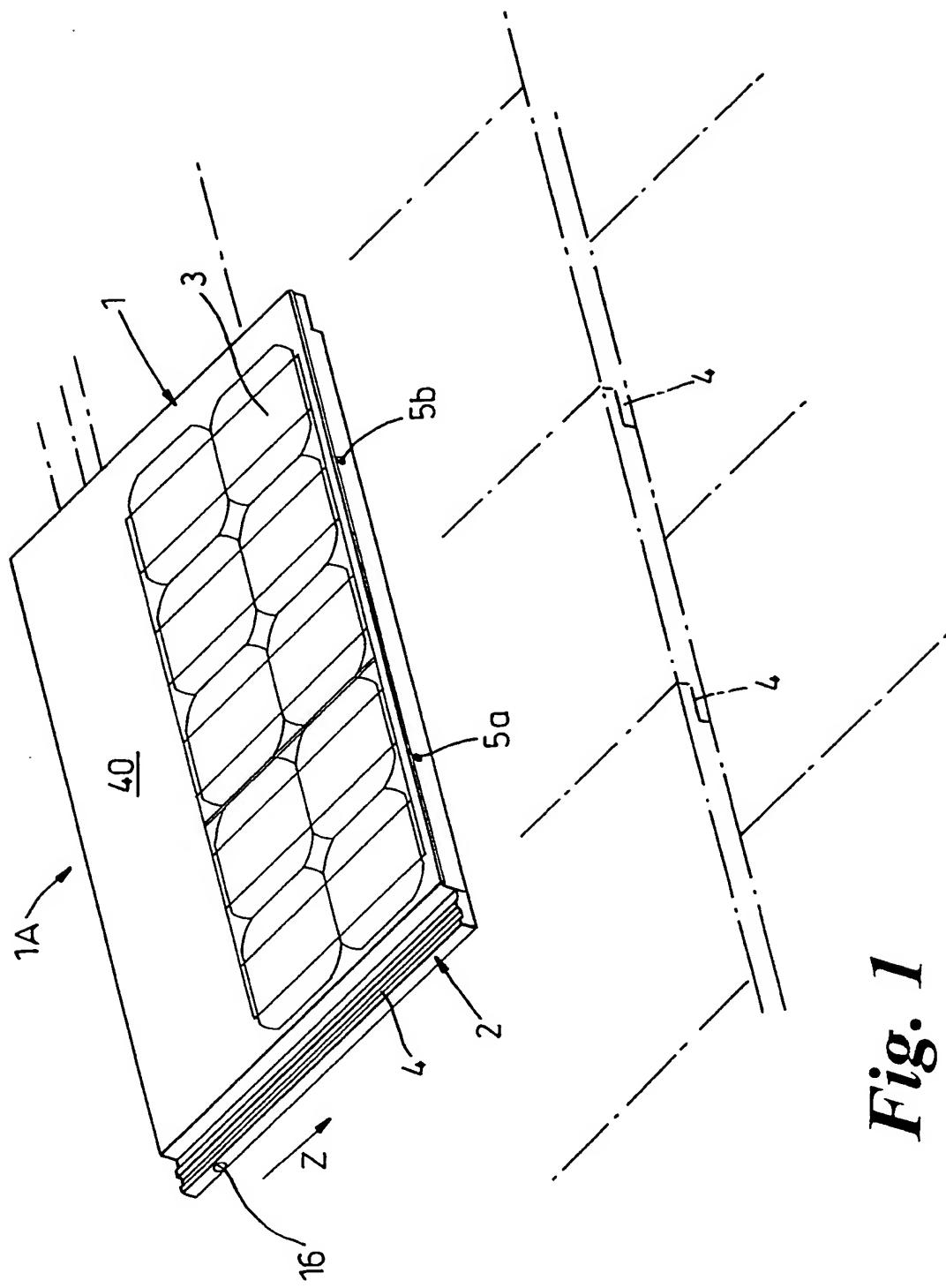
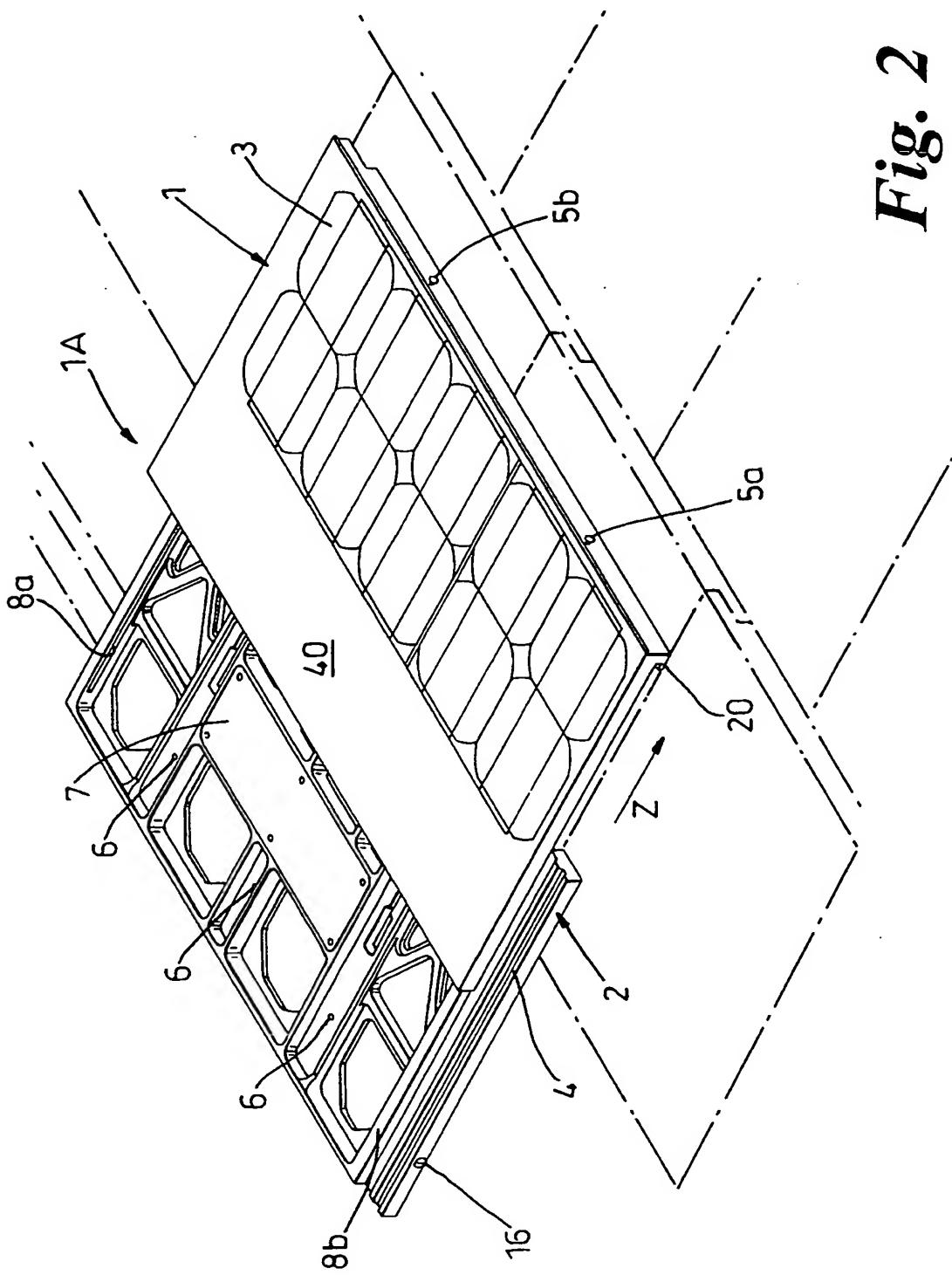


Fig. 1

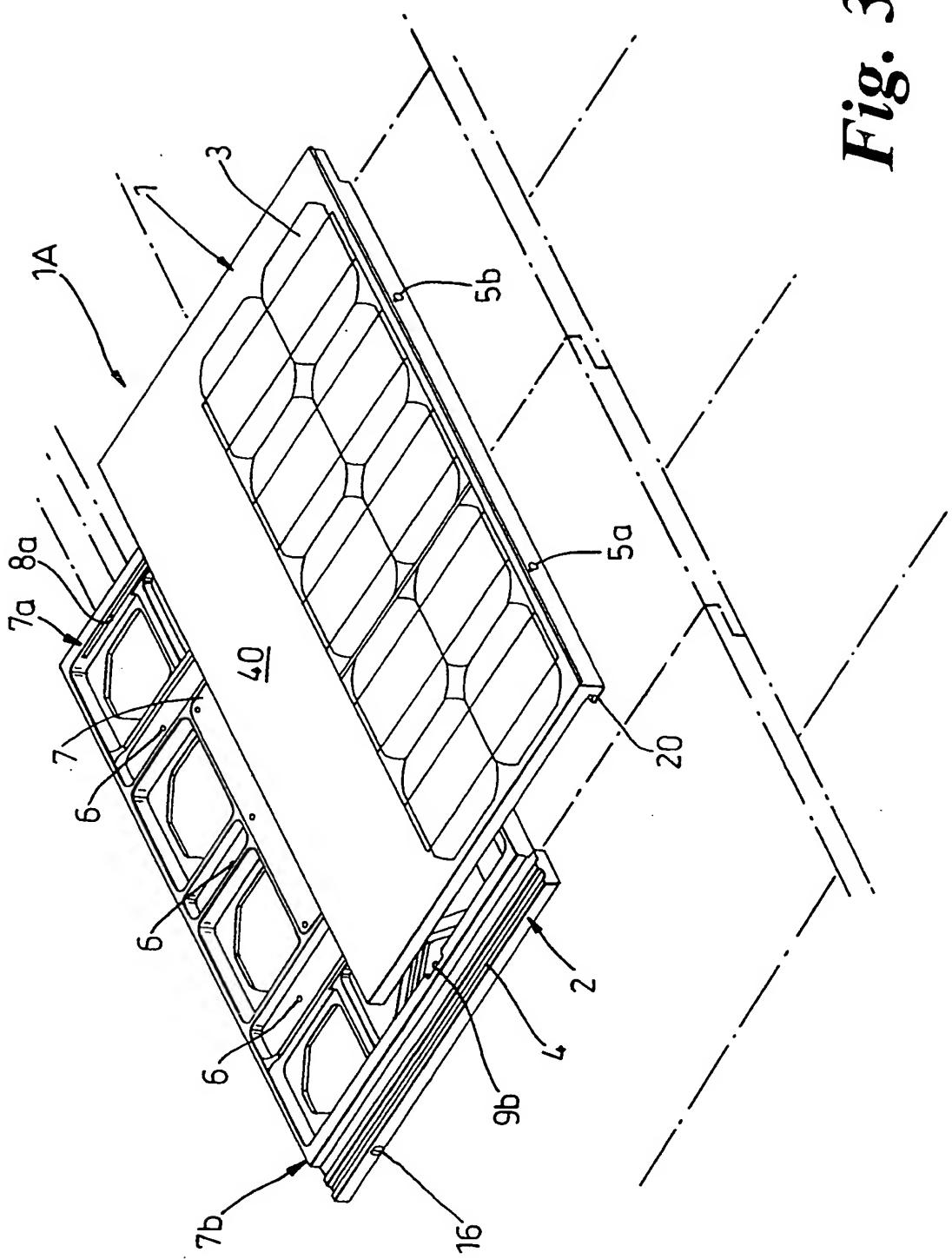
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Fig. 2



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Fig. 3



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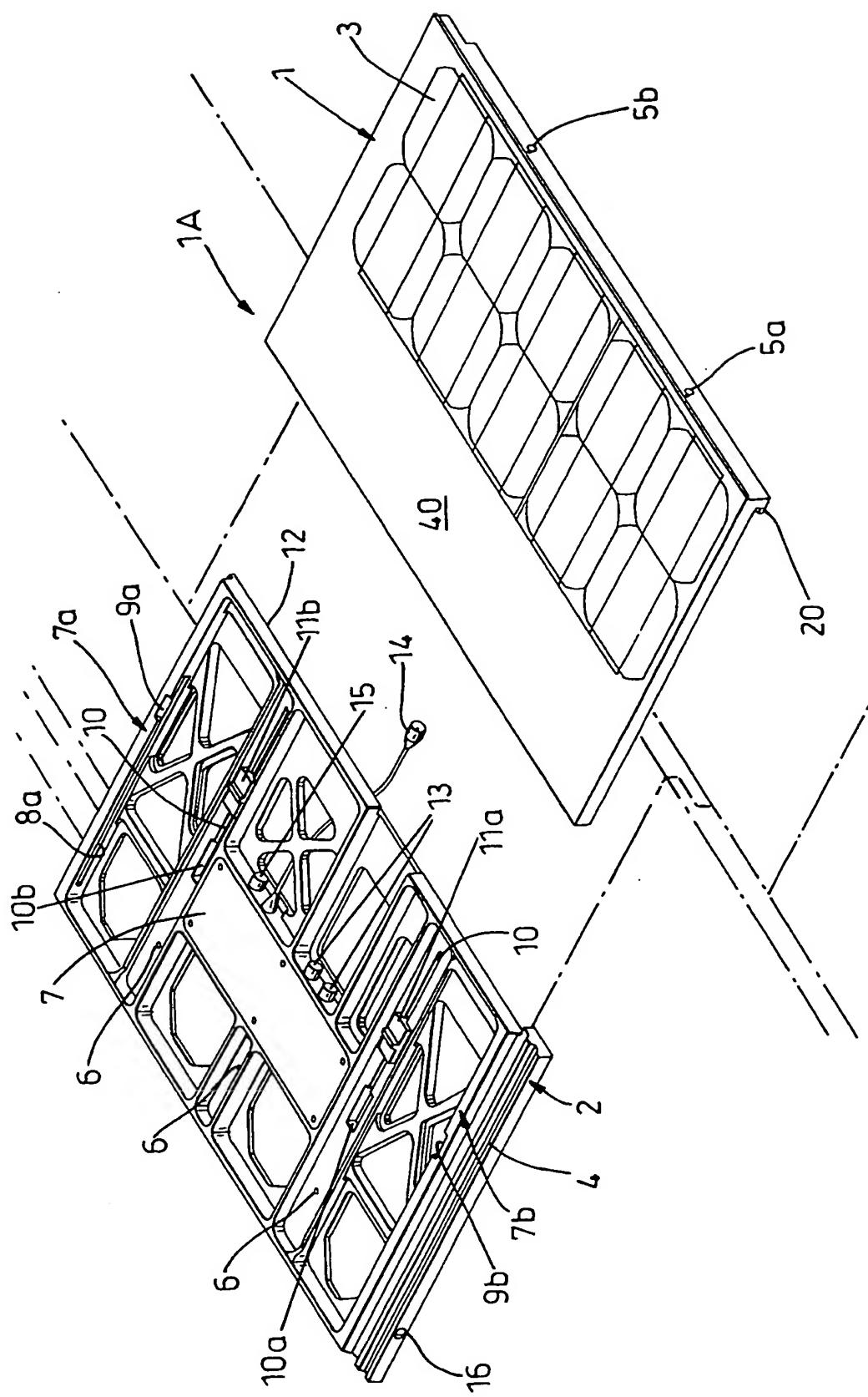


Fig. 4

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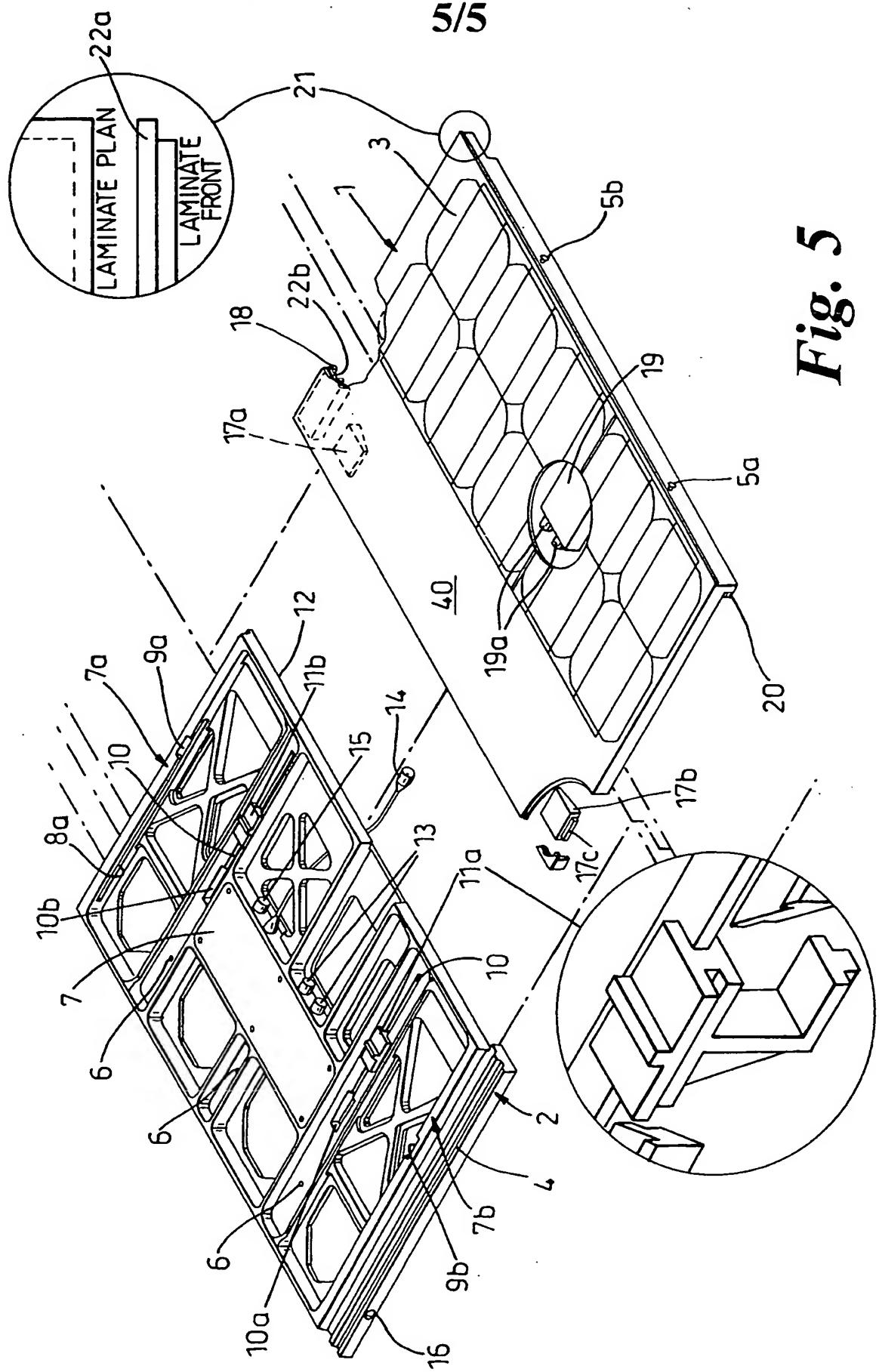


Fig. 5